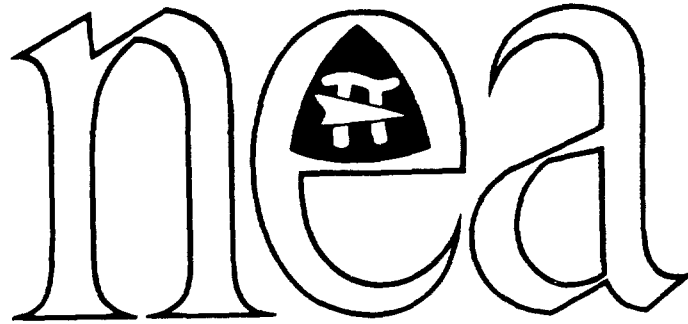


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**TESTIMONY OF THE NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
ON
CHILDREN'S TELEVISION PROGRAMMING**

**BEFORE THE
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION**

**PRESENTED BY
DR. GARY D. WATTS**

JUNE 28, 1994

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List A B C D E

My name is Gary Watts. Most recently, I was the Senior Director of the National Education Association's National Center for Innovation and held concurrently the position of Assistant Executive Director of the NEA's Center for Teaching and Learning. I am pleased to represent the NEA at today's hearing and to talk with you about children's television programming.

While the broadcasting industry has produced some quality shows in response to the Children's Television Act of 1990, there is still much work to be done. For children and parents, there is a demand for more educational programming that is new and exciting. For teachers there is a definite need for more high-caliber programs that can enhance and stimulate children's learning and enrich other learning environments including schools. Recognizing the strong influence that television can have on children, broadcasters must work with educators and parents to ensure that the influence is a positive one by producing creative television shows that meet children's educational needs, not just their entertainment desires.

Can we know when we see educational programming? Of course! Time limits us today but I suggest three basic components of educational programming.

Programs defined as "educational" must have at their core a primary educational objective, be age and developmentally appropriate, and have embedded in it active learning or other research based learning strategies. Educational television should have teaching as its primary purpose, but we should understand that education and entertainment are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, many of the qualities that make a television show successful, such as the ability to grab the attention of the audience and convey a message, are similar to those found in any successful classroom.

Regarding the issue of a clear educational objective, let's understand that as random, laissez-faire instructional settings have failed and been abandoned in formal educational settings, so must entertainment programs with a few scattered content messages be rejected as educational television. A good teacher can readily tell you what the

educational objective is in any lesson, demonstration, or activity. Children's television presented as educational must meet that same standard.

In fact, if we are going to capitalize on the reverberation between learning in the home, learning in school, and educational broadcasting, those learning/educational objectives must be known in advance by parents and teachers. Only then will the educational programming be truly enriching, supporting, and enhancing of other educational activities.

The power of the television medium to reinforce learning, stimulate curiosity, and help children form self-concepts should not be underestimated. Programs like "Sesame Street" have become institutions for American children because of their innovative ability to teach concepts such as numbers, letters, and sharing. One example of how television can educate in a unique way is the use of highlighted captions in educational programming as a means to help children learn to read. Children's educational television shows should help youngsters understand mathematics, science, and languages and enhance their social development. These shows should also serve the specific educational needs of children, aged 2-16, as required by the law.

Regarding the issue of age appropriateness, we urge the FCC to issue guidelines for age-appropriate programming.

The educational and informational benefits of programs for children are lost if programs are below or above a child's cognitive ability and level of comprehension. Broadcasters must air programs that not only meet the educational needs of the diverse age span specified in the legislation but also challenge each group's imagination. The intellectual demands of a pre-schooler and a pre-teen cannot be equally met within the same program.

Regarding embedded learning strategies, we recommend that the classification of educational programming be limited to programming that promotes active learning or other research based learning strategies such as repetition and rehearsal, outlining, drawing analogies or inferences. Because children live in such a passive learning world, I put special emphasis on strategies of active learning. Shows should involve children in physical activity, as in

"Barney" and "Sesame Street," or engage children in intellectual activities, as in "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood" and "Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego?"

Words such as "join in"; "think about"; "give me another example"; "do it again"; "ask your mother"; "count aloud"; and similar others should be the heart and soul of educational broadcasting. If you want a quality living example of someone who understands this well, ask Shari Lewis, who will be appearing this afternoon, how she plans for the involvement of the broadcast audience.

Networks must be required to accept their responsibility as trustees of the public airwaves to educate in a positive and effective way, rather than simply providing token "FCC-friendly" programming in compliance with the letter of the Act. It is essential that the networks send a signal to writers and producers that they are seeking a new form of children's programming.

We urge the networks to follow the strategy pioneered by the public broadcasting industry--create distinguished programming for children, air it in time slots appropriate for the age group, and aggressively promote the programs. The success of educational programming also requires consistent and appropriate scheduling of children's shows. Children's programs should be shown between 7:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. Although the dynamics of a changing American family create a need for more flexibility in scheduling, educational shows should air when they can be seen by most children. We also recommend that individual shows be at least one-half hour in length and that there be at least one hour of educational programming a day. Short-segment programs should count toward a broadcaster's obligations under the Act only if they accompany full-length programs.

To summarize, we support a clearer definition of children's programming that would include mandates for educational objectives, age appropriateness, and active learning. Children's television should have a consistent schedule, be aired at appropriate times, and meet guidelines on length and amount of daily programming. We look forward to future opportunities to work with you on our specific recommendations and appreciate the opportunity to share our views with the subcommittee. Thank you.

GARY D. WATTS

BIOGRAPHICAL FACT SHEET

Dr. Gary D. Watts is a nationally recognized educational change expert with extensive experience in educational reform and restructuring. Special focus areas include educational technology, professional development of educators, and school reform innovations.

For over a decade, Dr. Watts was the lead staff member in the National Education Association for the Association's educational change and transformation activities. He founded and served as the Senior Director of the National Center for Innovation and held concurrently the position of Assistant Executive Director of the NEA's Center for Teaching and Learning. The NEA National Center for Innovation was created to strengthen, expand, and coordinate NEA's school renewal projects involving schools and school districts nationwide. There are approximately 70 project sites.

Dr. Watts has spoken to numerous audiences of educators, business representatives, educational policy makers, government officials, and parents. He has served as a member of several advisory committees and commissions including the Public Broadcasting System (PBS), the Secondary and Elementary Education Service, the National Center for Technology in Education at Bank Street College, the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) of the U.S. Department of Labor, the Executive Board of the Consortium for School Networking (CoSN), and the Business and Education Conference of the National Conference Board (cochair). Dr. Watts also shared direct responsibility for the production of TeacherTV, a joint partnership between the NEA and Discovery Communications that broadcasts weekly on the Learning Channel.

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NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

FACT SHEET

PURPOSE: The National Education Association (NEA) was founded in 1857 "to elevate the character and advance the interest of the profession of teaching and to promote the cause of education in the United States."

MEMBERSHIP: NEA has more than 2.1 million members, including elementary and secondary teachers, higher education faculty, educational support personnel, retired educators, and students preparing to become teachers. NEA is the nation's largest professional employee organization.

AFFILIATES: NEA has both state and local affiliates. The 52 state-level affiliates include the 50 state associations, the Overseas Education Association, and the Asociacion de Maestros de Puerto Rico. NEA has more than 13,250 local affiliates, including some 560 higher education affiliates—more than any other faculty bargaining representative.

GOVERNANCE: The NEA Representative Assembly (RA) is the Association's top policy-making body. It is the world's largest democratic deliberative body—larger than the Democratic and Republican national conventions combined. The 1993 RA comprised more than 9,000 elected delegates. The 1994 RA will take place July 3-6 in New Orleans.

The 159-member NEA Board of Directors acts for the Association between meetings of the Representative Assembly. The Board meets at least five times a year. The Board includes at least one director from each state, plus an additional director for each 20,000 NEA Active members in the state, six directors representing the Retired members of the Association, and three directors representing the Student members of the Association. The Board may also include at-large representatives of ethnic minorities, administrators, classroom teachers in higher education, and Active members employed in educational support positions. A representative of each of the four ethnic minority groups referenced in the NEA Bylaws serves on the Board in a nonvoting capacity.

PRESIDENT: Keith Geiger, a mathematics and science teacher from Livonia, Michigan, became NEA president September 1, 1989, after six years as NEA vice-president. He is the Association's top officer, spokesperson, and policy leader. His 25-year career in public education includes serving as president of the Michigan Education Association and the Livonia (Michigan) Education Association.

VICE-PRESIDENT: Robert (Bob) Chase, a junior high school social studies teacher from Danbury, Connecticut, became NEA vice-president September 1, 1989. Chase, former president of the Connecticut Education Association, served for five years on the NEA Executive Committee beginning in 1984.

SECRETARY-TREASURER: Marilyn Monahan, an elementary reading, math, and science teacher from New Hampshire, was elected NEA secretary-treasurer September 1, 1990. Monahan served as president of NEA-New Hampshire from 1983 to 1990.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: Don Cameron, a former teacher of American and world history from Birmingham, Michigan, became NEA executive director June 1, 1983. He was assistant executive director between 1979 and 1983. Cameron served as executive director of NEA's Florida affiliate, the Florida Teaching Profession-NEA, from 1976 to 1979.

PROGRAM AND STAFF: NEA employs some 550 staff members, who work at NEA Headquarters in Washington, DC, and in the six regional offices. Staff members are deployed in six major centers:

- Center for Administration and Finance
- Center for Advocacy
- Center for Membership and Affiliates
- Center for Policy and Strategic Planning
- Center for Public Affairs
- Center for Teaching and Learning